

MCELROY

Waterloo averaged 3,000 fans in 1960s

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him. If he wasn't being dressing, you weren't dressing."

By 1966, 36 at the time, and 38-year-old Blinky Boyce were the oldest players on that first Black Hawks team, which won 11 of its 27 games in the 1963-64 season. Smith, at 21, was one of the youngest.

The United States Hockey League was made up of only five teams at the time — Green Bay, Rochester, St. Paul and Des Moines were the others — and would change faces several times over the next 32 years.

It included such Ontario sites as Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay, Wisconsin cities like Madison and Milwaukee and Michigan towns such as Marquette, Calumet, Travers City and Copper Country.

But Waterloo was a constant. Men like Dick Wyng, Harold Speck, Mike Lorenzen, Del Kendall, Bob Kehler and Robert Peterson helped establish the team, and McElroy Auditorium soon became one of the town's social centers.

Waterloo averaged over 3,000 fans per home game during the 1960s and once drew 5,059 to a game against Marquette in 1966.

"It was always great in those days," Smith says. "They'd come to the game in suits and ties. It was an outing."

Sunday afternoon games were common and fans would invite players to their homes for dinner afterward. Players worked fulltime jobs during the week and earned between \$25-100 per game for hockey on the side.

With only six teams in the National Hockey League, there was no shortage of talented stars who were willing to play for a modest price.

Waterloo attracted some good ones.

City of champions

The success of the early teams has never been matched in 32 years of Black Hawks hockey. Waterloo's string of five consecutive USHL championships, starting with the 1963-64 season, might not be duplicated for a long time.

Six others who are still in town — Swick, Taylor, Bob Dobbey, Wayne Winkula, Paulie Johnson and Dave Mazur — joined the Hawks during those years and helped produce a crisp, net-passing and winning brand of hockey.

Waterloo recorded a 101-49 record over that five-year stretch and won titles under three different coaches. Brumm guided the first title team before leaving to start a club in Marquette, Mich.

But McRae coached the next three winners and Leskun led the 1967-68 group to its fifth straight title with what has been called the best team in Black Hawk history. It finished 27-6-1.

It was a team without a true superstar during those years, although the array of individual talent was certainly impressive.

Johnson starred for the gold medal-winning 1960 U.S. Olympic team and played again in the 1964 Games. Many consider him the best forward in Waterloo history. "Paulie had a million-dollar set of legs," McRae says.

Dobbey was one of the top defensemen in the New York Rangers farm system and touted as a future NHL player before losing an eye to a high stick during a 1958 game in Buffalo. He was the Black Hawks' first real enforcer.

Another standout during those early days was center Tim Taylor, who went on to coach the U.S. Olympic team and served Yale University.

But the one seen by his former teammates as most responsible for Waterloo's success in the 1960s was goaltender Jim Coyle.

Coyle, from Delhi, Ont., joined the Black Hawks in the middle of their first season after a career at the University of Michigan. He backed up Jim Soffak that year, then became Waterloo's top man between the pipes through the 1973-74 campaign.

Though he stood 5-foot-7 and 155 pounds when he joined the team, no one came up bigger than Coyle.

"If we hadn't had Jim Coyle in goal, we'd have won maybe two of those three championships," Dobbey claims. "He was the best goalie in the league by far."

"He was something special," Swick

adds. "Just unbelievable."

Iowa's Stars

The Black Hawks suspended operations before the 1969-70 season, and the Minnesota North Stars' farm team came in from Memphis for what turned out to be a one-year stay in the Central Hockey League.

Feeling sold out by local ownership, some of the veteran Black Hawks signed on with Green Bay and continued to play in the USHL. Others stayed and worked as linemen during Iowa Stars games.

Meanwhile, Waterloo's fans were treated to some of the best hockey ever played at McElroy Auditorium.

The Stars' roster featured no less than 10 future NHL names, including those of Gilles Gilbert, Walt McCracken and Dennis O'Brien. "They were the best players we've ever had here," says Dobbey.

More than the players, however, what many people remember about the Stars' season in Waterloo was the most controversial offside call in McElroy history.

Swick, working the lines in the team's next-to-last game against Fort Worth, wowed off an empty-net goal by Waterloo's Mike Chernoff in the final minute. He said Chernoff took the puck on an illegal two-line pass. "It wasn't even a close call," Swick said at the time, and he stands by his call today.

The fans disagreed. They showered the ice with debris when the goal was disallowed and again when Fred Speck scored for Fort Worth with 22 left in the game, producing a 3-3 tie and keeping the Hawks from a possible championship.

After the game, Stars general manager John Muckler and coach Parker McDonald joined their players on the ice in an onslaught of obscenities directed at Swick. Another former Black Hawk standout, Waterloo resident John Lesysen, was the other linemen.

All three officials were then trapped for nearly 15 minutes by a circle of fans outside the boards until Dutch van Deelen, an NHL supervisor of officials in attendance, walked onto the ice and led them off.

Swick downplays the fiasco now, confident he made the right call. He says van Deelen expressed agreement with what he called the game and that several others did the same. At the time, however, it was not such consolation.

"My wife has never been very crazy about this (officiating)," Swick was quoted as saying in the *Courier*. "And when she got that phone call that told her she'd better leave home because the place was going to be bombed, that did it."

Musketeers and mace

Many of McElroy's most memorable moments have involved the Sioux City Musketeers, who joined the USHL in the early 1970s and quickly became known for their on-ice antics.

How hot was this series? During a 1973-74 game at McElroy, a fan charged the Sioux City bench from behind and assaulted the Musketeers with mace.

"I'm skating at center ice and I look over and all of a sudden I see these guys rolling out onto the ice, just tumbling into it," Smith recalls. "And then it hit me."

"That was incredible," said Dobbey, who was serving in the official scorer's role he's held since his playing days. "I thought there was a sniper in the crowd or something. Players were falling out where they'd been shot."

The game was delayed while several members of both teams had their eyes washed out. Each finished the game with a shortened bench.

Dobbey's glass eye popped out during one game at McElroy, and a woman watching from the front row nearly collapsed. She had an even harder time when Dobbey picked up the eye, wet it with his mouth and put it back in.

Swick can spill out countless stories about the Waterloo-Sioux City rivalry from his days as coach of the Black Hawks.

Like the time he bailed one of his players out of a Sioux City jail after the Black Hawk stepped on a policeman's foot with his skate. And the time a group of angry Musketeers fans jumped on Swick's back with enough force to send all of them, along with the crashers surrounding Sioux City's rink, crashing to the ice.

"Those were some wild games," says

Black Hawks in McElroy

Season	W	L	T	BP	Pts	Finish	Coach
1962-63	11	16	0		22	3rd	Oskee Brumm
1963-64	19	11	0		38	1st	Oskee Brumm
1964-65	17	11	0		34	1st	But McRae
1965-66	21	9	0		42	1st	But McRae
1966-67	17	12	1		35	1st	But McRae
1967-68	27	6	1		55	1st	Butch Leskun
1968-69	20	16	2		42	3rd	Butch Leskun
1969-70	Suspended operations; Iowa Stars finished 35-26-11 in CHL.						
1970-71	19	19	2		40	2nd	Tuffy Hall
1971-72	15	17	0		30	3rd	Bill Dobbey
1972-73	23	18	1		47	3rd SD	Hal Schooley
1973-74	29	18	1		59	2nd SD	Dave Swick
1974-75	30	15	1		61	1st SD	Dave Swick
1975-76	30	18	0		60	2nd SD	Dave Swick
1976-77	20	28	0		40	3rd SD	Swick, Jack Barzee
1977-78	44	20	0		88	1st SD	Jack Barzee
1978-79	45	13	0		90	1st SD	Jack Barzee
1979-80	27	19	2		56	1st SD	Jack Barzee
1980-81	16	32	0		32	3rd SD	George McPherson, Ken Yackel, Frank Anzalone

1981-82	11	36	1		23	7th	Ed Stawley, Scott Murphy
1982-83	6	42	0		12	7th	Scott Murphy
1983-84	11	38	1		23	7th	Harry Ray
1984-85	21	27	0		43	6th	Harry Ray
1985-86	16	31	1		34	7th	Jeff Art
1986-87	23	25	0		46	4th	Jeff Art
1987-88	20	25	3		44	8th	Jeff Art
1988-89	9	39	0		20	9th	Nick Whelan
1989-90	7	38	3		19	9th	Nick Whelan
1990-91	17	29	2		40	9th	Rob Grillo
1991-92	21	25	2		46	6th	Rob Grillo
1992-93	17	28	3		41	7th	Scott Mikesich
1993-94	3	17	5		28	10th	Scott Mikesich
1994 (inc.)	5	15	1		16	10th	Scott Mikesich
Totals	647	713	28		1,387		18 head coaches

NOTE: In 1983-84, the USHL began awarding a bonus point in the league standings for an overtime loss.

Swick, who coached the Black Hawks to a Southern Division title in 1974-75. Waterloo won three straight divisional championships under Jack Barzee beginning with the 1977-78 season, but it was that year that marked a change on the local hockey landscape.

The USHL merged with the Midwest League in the summer of 1977, prompting a switch from the salaried senior players to junior hockey. The Hawks put a combination team of junior and senior players on the ice for two years — winning playoff championships in both 1977-78 and 1978-79 with a stringing two-year record of 89-33-0 — before the seniors were phased out.

The glory days were gone, and interest began to wane.

Close to home

Besides the strong contingent from places like Sault Ste. Marie and Marquette, Mich., a few local favorites began to make names for themselves during Waterloo's senior hockey era.

Ed Stawley was the first product of the Waterloo youth program to win a regular job with the Black Hawks and was one of the team's leading scorers during the mid-1970s. "And Starkey, who now runs Skatesport and remains involved in local recreational hockey, also coached the Hawks for part of the 1981-82 season and is the lone Waterloo native among the nine members of the Black Hawk Hall of Fame. Scott Murphy grew up with Starkey, played parts of three different seasons with the Black Hawks and took over for Starkey as coach in 1982.

Walt Kyle Jr. is still a big name among local hockey products. He never coached the Black Hawks, but since his Waterloo playing days he has coached the U.S. Junior Nationals and now guides the San Diego Gulls of the International Hockey League. His dad, Walt Kyle Sr., was one USHL commissioner.

Many more players grew out of the once-dominant Columbus and Warrior high school programs and played for the Black Hawks as juniors. A few of the more successful local players included Doug Dietz, Mark Lanigan and Scott Dolan.

But the number of former Black Hawks who now consider themselves locals far exceeds the actual number of in-town players. No less than 11 players from the Waterloo league teams are still in town and most have remained involved in high school, youth and recreational hockey as coaches at one time or another.

"The thing we noticed about the junior hockey now," says Smith, "is that it's the same way as the (minor league) baseball player. He comes to town, he's on the road and at the end of the year he's gone. We came to town and stayed."

"So you could walk down the street in the middle of the summer and a guy would come up and talk hockey. It was more a part of the community."

Young guns

Junior hockey has taken McElroy for a rocky ride.

Attendance has fluctuated wildly over the past decade and a half, and twice there was talk about the team possibly folding. Barzee assumed financial control of the team in 1980 and moved it to Dubuque, but the Black Hawks continued when the Northeast Iowa Hockey Association moved its Heneppin, Minn. franchise here. The Dubuque Fighting Saints became an instant rival.

Financial troubles also came to a head in 1983 and 1987, when there was again talk of dissolving the team. Again the Black Hawks survived, and over the last three years the team has enjoyed a resurgence at the box office under Chicago-based owner Barry Soskin and general manager Scott Brann.

While the Black Hawks continue to draw respectable crowds, their on-ice record as a junior club has been dismal.

Last year's 33-15 record and second-place finish marked the team's first winning season since 1979-80, its first as an all-junior squad. The Hawks spent just about the entire decade of the 1980s at or near the bottom of the USHL standings, winning less than 10 games three times.

The two best junior players to don Black Hawk uniforms did so for only part of a season, but twin brothers Chris and Peter Ferraro brought magic back to McElroy after being traded from Dubuque during the 1991-92 campaign.

"That first game the Ferraro brothers played here was something," Dobbey says of the New York Rangers draft choices.

"It was hard to believe, really. They scored the first three or four times they were on the ice against Dubuque, their old team. Just beautiful goals, and the people were going crazy."

But then, rabid fans are nothing new to McElroy Auditorium, whose rink-side boards were recently sold to a group in Cedar Rapids for indoor soccer use.

It will take quite some time before the new ones at Young Arena are scuffed with as many memories.

HOCKEY

Area figure skating sees surge, as well

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more than 100 hours in the past three years, and further growth in the coming years could force the commission to expand its Young Arena hours.

"Some people are coming in with the hours available, but that comes with growth," Eggleston said. "We're practically growing out of our time."

The Northeast Iowa Figure Skating Club has seen a similar surge in recent years. Tom Reardon of the Recreation

Commission said. He said that growth can be attributed to several factors including the 1994 Winter Olympics and the excitement over the buildup of the 2002 Winter Games.

"When the U.S. Olympic hockey team and the figure skaters are showing up on national TV, there tends to be more interest," Reardon said. "I think the figure skating is kind of well-kept secret in Waterloo. We've got some great instructors in town at the skill level gets better and better every year."

Eggleston noted that the boom in popularity of in-line skating (rollerblading) has also contributed to the larger number of people on the ice the past two years.